

**State Board of Education
January 15, 2008
Item K**

Team: Secondary Transformation Team/Life Long Learning

Discussion Topic: Vermont Secondary Schools for the 21st Century

Alignment with Goals: Goal I: Support high quality innovative instruction to improve student achievement.

Background Information:

This topic emerges from the State Board’s current discussions regarding the transformation of education in Vermont. Efforts to address secondary transformation began in 1999 with Vermont’s “High Schools on the Move” (HSOM) document. Initial efforts to apply the research-based principles of HSOM were scattered, though many Vermont high schools implemented one or more of those principles. With the rapidly evolving nature of the global economy and the “flat world” of the 21st Century, the original HSOM principles must be refreshed through a new perspective. While faithful to the HSOM principles, the attached document sets a more active path for the DOE and the field as the Board’s transformation initiative begins to solidify.

Purpose of Discussion:

This is an opportunity for the Board to gain an understanding of the work being undertaken by the Secondary Transformation Team, especially in regard to how it is aligned with the Board’s collective thinking and emerging vision. This document is intended to guide the initial work of this newly created team as the Board, Commissioner and Department staff continue the conversation with constituents about the transformation of education.

Cost Implications (Monetary and/or Staff Resources):

None at this time

Commissioner’s Recommendation: That the Board review this document and ask any clarifying questions or comment on the content.

Staff Available: Secondary Transformation Team (Bill Romond, Team Leader; Kay Charron; Carol Duley; Tina Muncy)

Vermont Secondary Schools for the 21st Century:
Ensuring Every Student can succeed in College, Career, and Citizenship

DRAFT for discussion purposes only

As indicated by recent discussions led and attended by the Vermont State Board of Education, “...it is clear we need to transform our education system so our children will be prepared for the world that awaits them.” While the transformation our State Board proposes encompasses all of Vermont’s schools, the purpose of this document is to describe what the Board’s vision for transformation might mean for Vermont’s secondary schools. This document takes the vision to the next step, implementation.

As the State Board describes, “Vermont’s education system has a lengthy history of accomplishments of which we can all be proud.” And as indicated below, it is possible to cite numerous Vermont examples of secondary school initiatives that advance the vision described by the Board. At the same time we can observe the drivers of change to our society: technological advances, transition to a more global economy and society, shifts in needed job skills, changing demographics and instant access to information. And we can see the data pointing to the need for continued transformation. This document, as crafted and influenced by many, can provide the road map for how we implement the Board’s vision as it applies to Vermont’s secondary schools.

In 2002, the Vermont Department of Education (VTDOE) released the 12 principles of *High Schools on the Move (HSOM)*. These principles continue to form the philosophical foundation for improving outcomes for secondary students in Vermont. During the commissioner visits to each high school and technical center during 2005-2006, we learned that many high schools are working to transform the HSOM principles into improved school practices. We observed 9th grade academies, career academies, professional learning communities, student advisories, thematic and project based instruction, team teaching, extended class schedules, use of houses and small learning communities, more rigorous curriculum expectations, formative assessment, literacy programs, more effective use of data, and many other initiatives. Yet individual high schools tend to be making isolated changes and are implementing only one or two of these new practices, though still within the traditional high school system. We found no high school that had yet accomplished systemic transformation. In fact, many teachers and school leaders expressed fatigue and frustration trying to manage too many separate change initiatives.

While most Vermont high schools are having success with many students, most high schools have sub-groups that are “falling through the cracks”. It is clear that a more comprehensive and systemic approach is needed and wanted. (Data references to be inserted here) State and local district policy is needed to focus more cohesive statewide and school-wide efforts to redefine 21st century outcomes and practices for Vermont’s secondary education system. Many schools asked for stronger, statewide coordination and support that could assist their local efforts. Therefore, the Department of Education has drafted a set of strategies that research suggests could be most critical to ensuring that all secondary students graduate with the knowledge and skills essential for 21st century success in college, careers, and citizenship. We will convene groups of Vermont educators to collectively refine and improve these draft strategies for 21st century secondary schools. We will also work to build broad based political and fiscal support for transforming secondary schools, and to provide technical assistance and policy leadership for schools to systemically implement the strategies in the ways that best fit with their local goals, culture, and opportunities. The strategies are not a “cookie cutter” model for 21st century schools. No two

strong secondary schools need to look alike. The purpose of the strategies is to give the state and schools a blueprint and accountability structure for re-inventing secondary education.

Our initial design includes five strategic areas , all aligned with the State Board vision:

- I. **Student Competency for the 21st Century:** Aligned closely with the Board’s “Student-centered Education” focus, competence in the 21st Century will look different than it did in the past. Thomas Friedman describes a “flattened world” that requires successful citizens to expect change, become entrepreneurial, and abandon the 20th Century definition of “career”. In addition to an expanded array of skills, students need to demonstrate their mastery of those skills in a variety of ways.
- II. **21st Century Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment:** The strategies embodied here address concepts from two of the Board’s focus areas: “Student-centered Education” and “Flexible Learning Environments”. Research shows that students learn best in challenging learning environments that have relevance to them and that engage them both mentally and physically. Promoting true inquiry and hands-on/minds-on opportunities will be the hallmark of 21st Century learning.
- III. **Student Support System:** A comprehensive student support system incorporates three of the Board’s priorities: “Student-centered Education”, “Flexible Learning Environments”, and “Engaged Community Partners”. The student support system is integral to a school learning environment where all students can succeed with challenging academics, make informed choices about their goals, and manage their own learning options. Students are supported in their academic, career, and personal/social development. The effectiveness of a school’s student support system is measured by the success of their students.
- IV. **Support for Teachers and School Leaders:** This section most closely aligns with the “Leadership” focus of the Board, but also addresses “Student-Centered Education”. Envisioning a future that is not based on the past presents significant challenges to teachers and administrators. While many support the idea that secondary schools must transform to better meet the needs of 21st Century learners, professionals in each school must determine what the transformation actually means for them and their school. This work must be ongoing, comprehensive, and collaborative. It is not achievable in isolation, and requires that professionals personify the mantra of “life long learning” as they seek to understand and implement 21st Century learning models.
- V. **Policy and Use of Data to Drive Improvement:** This component directly supports the Board priority of “Results and Indicators of Success”. Large systems tend to resist change and then move slowly when change is required. New or amended policies, creative use of new and evolving data systems, and a philosophy that change (and improvement) is constant must strongly influence secondary school transformation initiatives.